



THE IMPACT OF NORTH KOREA'S NUCLEAR WEAPONS PROGRAM ON ITS ECONOMY AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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ABSTRACT

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) has undertaken a broad range of activities over the years that has drawn mass international attention and criticism, especially towards their nuclear weapons program and testing. Under the succession of the Kims, North Korea views these nuclear weapons as the sole means of survival due to their worries of abandonment from their superpower allies as seen in the past and of being threatened by opposing military forces surrounding its territory. After witnessing the losses of political power in countries such as Ukraine, Iraq, and Libya due to their disarmament and surrender of nuclear weapons, the current leader Kim Jong-un views the nuclear weapons like an insurance policy - theoretically, these nuclear weapons guarantee North Korean security against other nations. The research paper seeks to look more in depth of how these nuclear weapons have caused some issues and crises in DPRK, impacting much of their systems and regional stability. The paper goes into an overview of the evolutionary stages of North Korea's nuclear developments and allows the readers to discover how DPRK's constant pursuits of nuclear power changed their foreign policies, relations with other countries, and regional economic status due to the sanctions imposed by the international community, all three of which were triggered by North Korea's nuclear tests and missile launches. The analysis of the historical, economic, socio-political, and international dimensions of North Korea's nuclear program is clearly shown in the research paper, bringing comprehensive understanding to its impacts, and shedding light of North Korea's actions in global politics.

KEYWORDS: Disarmament, Nuclear Weapons, Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), International Relations, Regional Stability, Economic Sanctions

INTRODUCTION

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea, also known as North Korea, faced much global public disapproval and criticism due to its nuclear weapons program. The issue, according to Jonathan D. Pollack, professor of Asian and Pacific Studies at the Naval War College and a research associate of the National Asia Research Program, North Korea's interest in nuclear science and technology may even date back to its establishment in 1948 where its regime led by Kim Il Sung witnessed the power of atomic weapons in the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki — the two atomic bombs were massively destructive, enough to force a country to capitulate, thus showing the United States' abilities in accomplishing dominance over Japan through the use of nuclear weapons, despite being halfway across the world.¹ Further spurred on by South Korea's revolutionary economic developments, loss of Cold War alliance relationships, and constant challenges to the survival of the regime, Kim, the founder and president of North Korea, saw the opportunity to achieve firm regional security and create a bargaining tool with the international community through the development and ownership of nuclear weapons.

Looking back a few centuries, North Korea's development of a nuclear arsenal has proven to truly benefit the country and bring diplomatic breakthroughs with the international community, guaranteeing North Korean security against other countries and governmental powers. This research paper seeks to explore

how North Korea's continuous and persistent pursuits in the development of nuclear arsenal has significantly influenced its 1) efforts towards denuclearization and, 2) limited access to global markets and resources resulting in sustained regional economic conditions.

Foreign Policy Decisions

North Korea's persistent desire for nuclear weapons brought much international attention which started from 1993 when they announced their withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), a treaty signaling a country's stance and commitment to nuclear weapons and technology prevention. Their ambition of developing such technology for their own benefit and security brought forth much tension and antipathy from the international community as nuclear arsenal developments create the possibility of world destruction. Moreover, DPRK's ambitions towards nuclear weapons resulted in the failure of various attempts made by other countries to limit North Korea's growing nuclear developments and thus displays how DPRK's efforts in the development of these types of technology lead to significant impacts.

To start, in 2003, the United States, China, South Korea, Japan, and Russia came together with North Korea to form the Six Party Talks - international efforts in trying to lessen the number of nuclear weapons North Korea possessed. Although meant to be a peaceful solution to avoid clashes with DPRK, North

Korea refused to remove their nuclear arsenals and went forth to conduct their first nuclear test in 2006 and the second in 2009, making the Six Party Talks ineffective. North Korea also claimed to not possess uranium enrichment activities for their nuclear arsenal, but other countries found their suspicions to be true as facilities relevant to the enrichment programs were found in Yongbyon in 2010. North Korea's decisions to lie to other countries about their development status created a huge mistrust between neighboring and other countries. Moreover, their continuous pursuit on the development of nuclear arsenals created a drastic change and rise in diplomatic and political tensions.²

In 2012, the United States initiated another denuclearization negotiation with North Korea and reached a deal called the "Leap Day Deal." Only two weeks after the deal was officialized, DPRK launched a long-range missile for the first time and amended their constitution declaring that from henceforth, their country would be a nuclear weapons state. Since then, North Korea has conducted various nuclear tests despite strong opposition from the international communities and enacted laws that declared their "permanent position as a nuclear weapons state," enacted a "law that consolidates the position of a nuclear weapons state for self-defense," and added on laws about "the policy of the nation's nuclear forces." The Leap Day Deal proved to be yet another failure to remove nuclear weapons from DPRK.³

Since then, tensions continued to rise due to the constant threat of their ever-rapid development of nuclear arsenals and uninterest in peace talks. North Korea continued its nuclear testing despite warnings from other global communities. In 2016, North Korea conducted their fifth nuclear test and launched 24 various ranges of ballistic missiles which other countries viewed as a "preemptive nuclear strike." In 2017, North Korea launched their sixth nuclear test and ICBM-class ballistic missile launches, threatening the world with the possibility of mass destruction. In 2022, DPRK conducted seven missile tests in one month which equated to be more than all of year prior and later launched an intermediate-range ballistic missile; this was the country's most powerful launch in the last five years. Their ambition and concentration on nuclear weapons led to various violations against many international treaties and agreements and creation and/or maintenance of ties with China and Russia, receiving support from Beijing and Moscow in blocking proposals of sanctions against North Korea on what was called "hostile moves" and "violation[s] of the moratorium." This further negatively impacted the interactions with the international community.⁴

Access to Global Markets and Resources

North Korea's deteriorating regional economy and situation has been caused by its continued pursuits of nuclear weapons. Their relentless focus on nuclear development limited their access to global markets and resources, contributing to a sustained state of economic hardships. What was created for security brought a series of economic sanctions and diplomatic isolation from other countries, restricting their access to global markets and resources. These sanctions were designed to pressure North

Korea into denuclearization by restricting its access to trade. Here are how some countries imposed sanctions against North Korea.

The United States of America

The U.S.A. started imposing unilateral sanctions restricting economic activities, designed to interfere with Pyongyang's rising developments towards nuclear technology. Sanctions imposed were through businesses, banks, companies, and individuals, all of whom were restricted from supporting DPRK's nuclear programs and testing. However, the United States attempted to negotiate, suggesting that they could partially lift its sanctions on the country in the case that North Korea agrees to stop its pursuits in creating nuclear weapons. Most recently, President Biden imposed sanctions on eight distinct organizations for aiding the missile programs in North Korea and set forth that for each step Pyongyang takes in denuclearization, the United States will slowly relieve its sanctions.⁵

South Korea

Having imposed unilateral sanctions since 2010, South Korea has continuously maintained their sanctions against North Korea until they take their steps towards denuclearization. However, South Korea has tried many ways in improving relations with DPRK, funding the country with billions of dollars through international organizations and offering to send medical supplies to protect the country from COVID-19.⁵

Japan

Japan has imposed sanctions against North Korea since 2006, completely restricting commercial and diplomatic exchanges. From 2016 and 2021, Tokyo announced new sanctions regarding DPRK's constant nuclear testing, North Korean and Chinese assets, bilateral trade, entry of North Korean citizens and/or ships, etc. They took on a monitoring role, keeping a lookout on the North Korean cargo in regional waters and monitoring them carefully. Most recently in 2022, Tokyo also sanctioned 13 different organizations for aiding with North Korea's developments towards missiles and nuclear arsenals.⁵

European Union

Starting from 2006, the European Union set up supplemental economic restrictions to: ban acceptance of people involved with the North Korean nuclear weapons program, restrict North Korean access to specialized training, and prohibit the exports of oil, luxury products, EU investment in aiding North Korean economic status, etc. Most recently in 2022, the EU increased its sanctions to stop individual and corporate involvement with North Korean weapons program.⁵

Australia

The country started imposing sanctions from 2006, disallowing any commercial dealings with Air Koryo (the North Korean national airline), partnerships with business involved with extracting raw materials, North Koreans traveling to Australia, and ships in Australian ports or waterways. Australia also imposed direct sanctions at specific North Korean individuals and corporations and are still adding on to the sanctions as of

recent.⁵

Faced with sanctions from all over the world and isolation, North Korea's unyielding pursuit of nuclear weapons led to a deterioration of its own economic situation and its regional well-being. These sanctions imposed have had an enormous damaging effect on the economy, infringing its ability to modernize their industries and develop in other areas other than nuclear development. North Korea began to struggle due to their limited access to vital resources like food, fuel, and medicine. However, instead of the elite in North Korea, it is much of the region's citizens who face severe economic and humanitarian challenges. According to a 2018 UNICEF report, around 200,000 North Korean children suffer from acute malnutrition and are at risk of starvation due to how sanctions prohibit the distribution and availability of humanitarian supplies from tightening sanctions. Another report shows one NGO taking more than 18 months to ship 16 boxes of beans to DPRK. Moreover, sanctions from 2017 prohibit the transport of the shipment of basic medical supplies, putting North Koreans at risk.⁶ North Korea's continuous pursuit of these nuclear technologies have not only created a deteriorating economy but also the deterioration of social order.

CONCLUSIONS

North Korea's relentless pursuit of nuclear weapons has had significant effects on the country, having generated severe domestic and regional problems, impacting their foreign policies, relations with the international community, and economic stability. This research paper explored and examined the series of failed negotiations and agreements for denuclearization, the strained international relations and how it came to be, and why North Korea's economy is limited and brings forth challenges to its citizens. Despite these problems, North Korea remains steadfast in its pursuit of nuclear weapons and committed to its program and unless they give up nuclear power, North Korea will continue to face economical, relational, and security consequences; it is imperative for the international community to find solutions to lessen global and regional impacts of North Korea's nuclear pursuit and promote peace on the Korean Peninsula.

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